

PATRONYMICS IN DENMARK  
AND ENGLAND

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## PATRONYMICS IN DENMARK AND ENGLAND

**P**ATRONYMICS ARE FATHERS' NAMES OR, TO BE MORE precise, a patronymic is an addition to a forename which contains information identifying the father of the bearer of the forename.

A genealogical determination of this kind is a widespread phenomenon that is evidenced from a very early period in the Indo-European area and, incidentally, in other cultures too.

There are three main ways in which patronymics have been formed on Germanic ground: as derivative patronymics, in which a derivative ending is attached to the father's name, e.g. *Wulfung* 'Wulf's son'; as inflexional patronymics, in which the father's name is added in a nominative form or a genitive form: *William* or *Williams* 'William's son'; and as compound patronymics, in which the father's name is compounded with a word for 'son', e.g. *Williamson*, *Wilson* 'Will(iam)'s son'. Several of these patronymics survive to the present day in fossilised form as surnames.

All three types occur in the South Germanic and West Germanic areas, whereas in Scandinavia the only type which can be considered to be native is, in my opinion, the third, the compound patronymics, i.e. the *-son*-names. When the other two types occur in Scandinavia, they are, as types, to be considered as loans, in particular from German.

This lecture, then, will concentrate on the compound patronymics, the *-son*-names, in Scandinavia and England. My point of departure will be England. I shall begin with a brief survey of the debate as to the origin and distribution of the English *-son*-names. This will be followed by an account of the system of patronymics that was in use in Denmark in the Viking period. Against this background I shall then attempt an assessment of the English names. I shall conclude with some thoughts on the

feasibility of a link between the use of the *-son*-names in Scandinavia and in England.\*

I should like to begin with a quotation:<sup>1</sup>

Surnames such as *Adamson* or *Addison* and *Wilkinson* are commonly regarded as characteristically northern names and their frequency is generally attributed to Scandinavian influence. This, like so many generalisations on surnames, is based on superficial and insufficient evidence . . . Our material . . . lends no support to the theory that surnames in *-son* are chiefly northern and of Scandinavian origin. They are found both before the Scandinavian settlement and later in the south, in areas unaffected by Scandinavian influence. Compounds with OE personal names are more numerous than those with names of Scandinavian origin and after the Conquest the great majority are formed from names of French origin brought to this country by the Normans.

This quotation is taken from the most recent comprehensive study of the history of surnames in England, P. H. Reaney's *The Origin of English Surnames*, 1967. Dr Reaney says 'commonly regarded' and 'generally attributed' without naming specific authorities. I may quote some excerpts from earlier literature to illustrate exactly what Reaney was reacting against.

In 1912 Harald Lindkvist published his book, *Middle-English Place-Names of Scandinavian Origin*. In this he discusses the marked Scandinavian strain in the place-names of Yorkshire and, in this connection, he continues:<sup>2</sup>

This Scandinavian local nomenclature is paralleled in Yorkshire by a personal one of the same nationality which is more numerous and varied than that of any other county. Only in Yorkshire have I met with instances of the well-known very usual O. Scand. type consisting of a prænomen + a patronymic compound ending in *-son*, *-sun*.

When Eilert Ekwall wrote the long section on The Scandinavian

\* I wish to thank Dr Gillian Fellows Jensen, Copenhagen, not only for translating my Danish text and its Scandinavian quotations into English but also for giving me much good advice on the relations between Scandinavia and the British Isles in the Viking period.—The Bibliography on p. 24 explains the references by authors' names in the footnotes. In a few cases I have introduced italics in quoted passages.

<sup>1</sup> Reaney 1967, pp. 86, 89.

<sup>2</sup> Lindkvist 1912, p. XLVI, no. 2.

Element in the *Introduction to the Survey of English Place-Names* (EPNS I) in 1924, he drew attention to a document from the end of the tenth century which deals with the refoundation of Medeshamstede (Peterborough) Abbey. He wrote that 'it is worthy of notice that the Scandinavian way of forming the patronymic, *Catlan sune*, is used, not the English in *-ing*', for the local landowners who are named, irrespective of whether their forenames are of Scandinavian or English origin.<sup>1</sup>

The Norwegian Einar Belsheim's great work, *Norge og Vest-Europa i gammel tid*, appeared in the following year. Belsheim was the first scholar to discuss the problem in detail. I translate:<sup>2</sup>

In one way the surnames in Northern England are much more reminiscent of Scandinavia than are those in the southern counties, since the old Scandinavian habit of employing the father's name in conjunction with 'son' is widespread in the former area, while it is almost unknown in much of Southern England. Names of this type (Johnson, Robinson, etc.) are particularly common north of the Humber and in the Scottish Lowlands. They are still very common in the greater part of the old Danelaw but become gradually less frequent to the south and hardly occur at all in the seven counties of Southwest England.

Belsheim continues by giving some numbers in tabular form.

The authors I have so far quoted as upholders of the theory of the development of the compound patronymic in England under Scandinavian influence have all been Scandinavians themselves. In 1928, however, a young English name-scholar, Hugh Smith, published an article on 'Early Northern Nick-Names and Surnames' in addition to *The Place-Names of the North Riding of Yorkshire* (EPNS V).

It was Smith's work on the place-names that gave him a first-hand knowledge of the sources in which names are recorded and the nomenclature of an important part of the Danelaw area. The interest of his survey article in the present context lies in what he has to say about the naming practices of the medieval peasantry in Northern England. The special contribution made

<sup>1</sup> Ekwall 1924, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Belsheim 1925, p. 140.

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by this social class to Middle English by-names consists, according to Smith, of patronymics and nicknames:<sup>1</sup>

The origin of these types is open to speculation, but an examination seems to show that there has been a good deal of Scandinavian influence . . . In (the) north of England . . . patronymics in *-son* are relatively of much greater frequency than in other parts of the country, and it is certainly more than a coincidence that patronymic formations with *-son* . . . are extremely common in ON.

The fact that patronymics in *-son* are rare in the early medieval period and first begin to reappear with regularity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is, according to Smith, a result of the practice common in earlier centuries of latinising by-names. An *Alanus filius Orm* would have been referred to as *Alan Ormson* in the vulgar tongue.<sup>2</sup> There had thus been no break in the continuity of the practice of employing patronymics in *-son*. Smith summarises his conclusions as follows:<sup>3</sup>

The Scandinavian contribution to ME surnames was in the form of nicknames and patronymics, though . . . it is likely that English names themselves would without this influence have ultimately arrived at the new methods of nomenclature which characterise the ME period, when surnames as we have them today first came into being.

C. L'Estrange Ewen, who published *A History of Surnames of the British Isles* in 1931, is of the same opinion as Smith. He speaks of 'Scandinavian *-sune* [sic], which was to have such a great influence in the moulding of English Surnames'.<sup>4</sup>

Two more Swedes commented on the problem in the course of the 1930s. Gustav Fransson, *Middle English Surnames of Occupation 1100-1350*, 1935, supports Smith's view:<sup>5</sup> 'The surnames ending in *-son* . . . are most common in the North of England, which seems to be due to Scandinavian influence.' Gösta Tengvik, *Old English By-Names*, 1938, takes a broader view of the question. He refers to some extremely old occurrences which reveal that

<sup>1</sup> Smith 1928, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Smith 1928, p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Smith 1928, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Ewen 1931, p. 56.

<sup>5</sup> Fransson 1935, p. 26.

the Anglo-Saxons were not unacquainted with the formation of this kind of patronymic, and he notes that the type was also known in the continental Germanic area. 'Therefore, I am not inclined to subscribe to the general assumption . . . that this type represents a Scandinavian importation.' Later, however, he adds: 'Of course the growing frequency of the suffix in the North during the ME period . . . should certainly be attributed to Scandinavian influence'—even though there seems to be no justification in the earlier literature for drawing this distinction between import and influence.<sup>1</sup>

I have now presented the most significant of the views of which Reaney was so critical. It will be recalled that Reaney denied not only that the *-son*-names could be a naming practice imported from Scandinavia but also that their later frequency of occurrence in Northern England could be a result of Scandinavian influence.

More recent studies of surnames and by-names have hardly touched upon the problem. The four volumes so far published of the English Surname Series are intrinsically descriptive rather than explanatory, and the authors, George Redmonds and Richard McKinley, do not commit themselves on the matter. It should be mentioned that John Geipel in *The Viking Legacy*, 1971, is of the opinion that, although the Scandinavians were not responsible for the introduction of the *-son*-names to the British Isles, their presence in some important Norse-settled districts of England (and Scotland) may have reinforced the established native practice,<sup>2</sup> and that the Swedish scholar, Bo Seltén, in his study, *The Anglo-Saxon Heritage in Middle English Personal Names. East Anglia 1100-1399*, I, 1972, states cautiously that, if the *-son*-names were generally more common in Danelaw counties than elsewhere, we must reckon with at least partial Scandinavian influence.<sup>3</sup>

In order to provide a more satisfactory background against which to assess the problem, I shall now attempt to give a

<sup>1</sup> Tengvik 1938, pp. 147, 148.

<sup>2</sup> Geipel 1971, pp. 174-9.

<sup>3</sup> Seltén 1972, pp. 48-9.

description of the patronymic-forming methods that were current in the Viking period in Denmark.

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Danish runic inscriptions from the Viking period contain the names of over 400 persons. For about 125 of these, or between one-third and one-quarter, there is information as to whose sons (or occasionally daughters) they were. This information is sometimes revealed by the inscription itself, viz., in cases where a patronymic description is appended to the forename of the dead man or the raiser of the stone: *Toka sun* or *sun Toka*. It is quite deliberately that I use the phrase patronymic description and not patronymic. This is because I am inclined to believe that at the time in question the phrases were not proper names but simply genealogical descriptions. There is not time for me to go into this question here, however, and it is of no particular significance for our problem.

There are other ways in which paternity can be revealed. Many of the inscriptions are constructed on the pattern 'X raised the stone in memory of Y, his father', e.g. 'Toke raised the stone in memory of Gunnar, his father'. In this case no patronymic description is added to the name of the stone-raiser because the relationship is revealed by the rest of the inscription. An inscription such as: 'Toke, Gunnars son, raised the stone in memory of Gunnar, his father', would have appeared clumsy because of its tautological specification of Toke's parentage.

There is no doubt in my mind that these patronymic descriptions have an emotional significance. They are meant as laudatory descriptions of the people in question. When they are used of the dead man, they are to be compared with other such laudatory comments as that the man in question was 'a good dreng', 'faithful to his lord', 'generous with food', or 'did not flee at Uppsala'. What is interesting and, for modern people, perhaps rather surprising is that these patronymic descriptions are equally frequently employed by the stone-raisers as undoubtedly laudatory self-descriptions. This is not, however, the only form of 'self-praise' to be found in the inscriptions. You will recall, for example, that on the big Jelling stone Harald Bluetooth gives prominence to



himself as the man who conquered all Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian.

In order to understand the mentality that made Viking Age man consider good birth to be a praiseworthy quality on a par with other positive characteristics, it is necessary to recall the significance of kinship in ancient society. This can best be done with the aid of two quotations, the one taken from the most recent comprehensive critical study of Viking Age history by a Scandinavian scholar, Aksel E. Christensen (1969), the other taken from a study of the obligations resting on the kin-group published by the Danish legal historian, Ole Fenger, in 1971. I translate:

In accordance with the structure of patriarchal Germanic society, it must be assumed that the family, which is referred to by the native words *æt* and *kyn*, was an important constituent element in the structure of Danish society in the time of King Gudfred. We also know how significant was the role played by the family in the Norse-Icelandic sagas and in all the Scandinavian provincial laws, and modern legal historians, no less than their predecessors, consider that the significance of the family in the preceding period must have been even greater.

Even though there is no evidence from the Danish area of fixed social classes with wergelds varying according to the status of the dead man, it is certain that the family's reputation had a decisive influence on a man's position. The family made up the smallest judicial unit; it dealt with disagreements arising between its own members, and the head of the family represented all its members at the thing or assembly. There would also seem to have existed from ancient times a close link between family and land, although it is now impossible to accept the old views about the inheritance of property.

It is not possible to give a more exact description of the social functions of the family because our sources are inadequate. The facts that artificial bonds of brotherhood were established and that within the resulting guilds there arose extensive amalgamations of 'sworn brothers' (*fratres conjurati*), who, taking the place of natural brothers, would provide each other with personal and judicial protection, can be taken as evidence of the decisive importance of the family in ancient times, whether it was a matter of a blood feud, compurgation or some other form of personal or judicial solidarity.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Christensen 1969, pp. 71-2.

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If one assumes that the central concentration of power, which we call the state, did not arise until a comparatively late period in the development of human society, then this society must earlier have consisted either of a collection of individuals or of groups of individuals. Since it is inherently probable that a number of the needs of the individual, for example the need for security and peace, were catered for communally, the family and the kin-group should be regarded as original social groups. If it is possible to speak of law before there was a state, then it must have been the groups rather than the individuals who were the object of judicial regulation, in that the group must have been the bearer of rights and obligations.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps some people may consider that it is an error of interpretation to treat the patronymic descriptions in the runic inscriptions as positive, laudatory comments on the people concerned. A knowledge of the way in which patronymics were used in later times may tempt some people to say that they merely have the practical function of distinguishing people with the same forename from each other. According to this point of view, then, patronymics are identification marks pure and simple, used in order to avoid confusion.

In my opinion, this view is mistaken. If identification had really been the primary aim behind the employment of patronymic descriptions by those who composed the runic inscriptions, then we should expect the descriptions to occur most frequently in connection with the commonest forenames. The possibility of confusing individuals with frequently occurring names would be greater than that of confusing individuals with rare names.

It is true that there are some extremely common runic forenames which have had a descriptive characterisation appended in all or almost all instances, for example in the form of a patronymic description. This is the case, for example, with the *Tuki* I mentioned above. There are other common runic forenames, however, which have been allowed to stand alone. There are, for example, ten men called *Atsur* and eight called *Thorgisl* who in spite of the popularity of their forenames have had to make do without further identification and manage with their forenames alone.

<sup>1</sup> Fenger 1971, p. 10.

On the other hand, many of the patronymic descriptions have been appended to otherwise unrecorded forenames. This is the case, for example, with *Sasgærth*, who erected one of the Skern stones in Jutland. Her name has not been recorded anywhere else in Denmark or the rest of Scandinavia. It must, at the very least, have been exceptionally rare and sufficiently distinctive in itself. Nevertheless, the inscription records that she was the daughter of *Finulv*.

There are also instances of the addition of patronymic descriptions to the names of people who were perfectly adequately identified in the inscriptions by means of other information. We can hardly imagine that Harald Bluetooth is referred to on the S. Vissing stone as *Gorms son* to ensure that he was not confused with some other Harald. The inscription itself makes it very clear which Harald is meant and there is absolutely no need for a patronymic description. The inscription reads: 'Tove, Mistive's daughter, Harald the Good's, Gorm's son's, wife, had this memorial constructed in memory of her mother.'

Let us now, as a kind of cross-check, take a look at those people in the runic inscriptions who are only referred to by their forename and about whom the inscriptions yield no further information. There are about 50 of these, or one out of every eight people named in the inscriptions. If the patronymic or other description had been meant as a mark of identification, then it would be expected that people who lacked such additions bore forenames which were so rare or unique that they were sufficiently distinctive in themselves. Confusion of individuals would be impossible.

There are, in fact, a few people in this group who fulfil these conditions. They bear rare or unique forenames and they are referred to by these alone.

There are also, however, some very common forenames which are allowed to stand alone without any kind of appendage. If identification had been important, how could it be possible for the *Sven* who erected the Valleberga stone in company with *Thorgot* to be referred to by his forename alone? We know nothing more about this stone-raiser than that he was called *Sven* and *Sven* was one of the very commonest forenames at

that time. This fact is revealed by other runic inscriptions, by contemporary place-names and by the frequent occurrence of *Sven* as a Danish name in the Danelaw. If patronymic descriptions were primarily marks of identification, why was one not used on the Valleberga stone?

My comments on *Sven* would apply equally well to many other forenames, *Tue*, *Asser*, *Thorgisl*, *Ulv*, *Tumi*, etc. In spite of the frequency of their occurrence in the Viking period, these forenames appear in runic inscriptions without further appendages or identifying descriptions.

There is thus nothing to support the view that the patronymic descriptions in the runic inscriptions were intended to remove ambiguity as to the identity of the *Sven* or *Asser* or *Toke* in question. They did not have any such practical and useful function. They were intended to exalt the persons in question as the sons or daughters of eminent men. They were to be treated as laudatory epithets in line with such other eulogistic qualifications as 'good', 'bold', 'generous', etc.

Such, then, was the naming custom that Danish Vikings of the higher social classes—and it is mostly such men that are met with in the runic inscriptions—brought over with them to England. It was usual to emphasise one's ancestry by means of a patronymic description consisting of a compound of one's father's forename and the word *son*. This designation was not intended as an aid to identification, as a means of distinguishing oneself from other men bearing the same forename, but primarily as a means of emphasising one's self-satisfaction by pointing to one's creditable relationship to an eminent, powerful, influential, brave, and in other ways meritorious, father.

Before I allow these doughty Vikings to go onboard their ships and cross the North Sea, it would perhaps be a good idea to take a look at the use of patronymics in Denmark in later times. If for no other reason, then merely to support my contention that Viking Age patronymic terms are emotionally charged. They are not neutral identifications but positive characterisations.

It can, in fact, be shown that medieval Danish noblemen used patronymics primarily as a means of emphasising their membership of a family. The most significant argument in favour of

concluding that this was their function is that the information they provide is superfluous. The identity of the people concerned is clearly revealed by other means.

In the oldest surviving Danish charter, St Knud's deed of gift to Lund cathedral from 1085, the King refers to himself not merely as *Kanutus quartus*, which would have identified him perfectly satisfactorily, but also as *Magni regis filius*, naturally as an enhancement of his reputation. Peder Sunesen, bishop of Roskilde, who was a member of one of Denmark's most aristocratic and most influential families, refers to himself in 1214 not only as *Dominus Petrus senior episcopus Roskildensis* but also as *filius Sunonis*, where the patronymic is superfluous as an identification but reasonable as an expression of the Bishop's pride in himself and his family.

From about 1300 it became general among Danish noblemen to refer to themselves by a combination of forename + patronymic + family-name, e.g. *Niels Jensen Due*. In a few instances, the patronymic in this combination can have an identifying function, viz. when there were two contemporaries bearing the same forename + family-name. In reality, however, this was a comparatively rare situation. Generally speaking, the patronymic in this type of combination is emotionally charged. For the *Niels* in our example, it was thus not enough merely to draw attention to the fact that he belonged to the *Due* family. He also wished to make known such a creditable fact about himself as that he was the son of *Jens Due* in particular.

It has been my aim to show that in the naming custom of at least the higher social classes in medieval Denmark, it is possible to recognize a use of the patronymic that can be compared with the one that I have argued is revealed in the runic inscriptions from the Viking period. There are reasons for believing that there is a connection, an uninterrupted tradition, between the two periods. The Danes did not make use of their patronymics because they were worried about the danger of being confused with other people but because they were proud of their parentage. It was a praiseworthy quality in itself to be the son or daughter of a distinguished father.

And now to England! What was the attitude of the native population to the Vikings? I am not thinking about the original physical confrontation, which must have been unpleasant enough, but about the more peaceful relationship which must have gradually developed in the years succeeding the invasion phase. How did the two groups communicate with each other? Were the English and the Scandinavians able to talk to each other, to understand each other's words and sentences? There has been a good deal of speculation about these questions but in the very nature of things such speculations must remain in the realm of guesswork. What is certain is that there must have been close and intense contact. This is shown by the influence which the Scandinavian language has had upon the vocabulary of English, an influence which, in my opinion, must reflect the presence of a very considerable Scandinavian element in the population. A reasonable guess would seem to be that the more linguistically-gifted members of the two population-groups would, after a period of acclimatisation, have been able to understand each other's language. The basic elements in the two vocabularies were identical and would have been recognisable, even when there had been different phonetic developments.

To these basic elements belong the two words, *son* and *daughter*, upon which the patronymic system of the Vikings was based and which are found in Scandinavian patronymics in forms differing little from those current in contemporary English.

The patronymic system which the Scandinavians found in use in England would not have been entirely unfamiliar to them and they may also have come across English parallels to the emotional use of patronymics to express pride in family that played such an important role in their homelands.

It was a continental Germanic patronymic system which met the Vikings in England. The best review of this system in the period up to about the year 1100 is still that by Gösta Tengvik in *Old English Bynames*, 1938. My following remarks are largely indebted to this work.

In the same way as in Germany relationship to a father could be indicated by either a derivative patronymic or a compound patronymic.

Derivative patronymics were formed by adding a suffix to the father's name, in casu the suffix *-ing*. *Ælfsige Hunlafing*, mentioned in 955, thus bears a patronymic formed on the Old English name *Hunlaf*; *Eadbeorht Eadgaring* and *Æthelheah Esning*, both named in 804, are the sons of men called *Eadgar* and *Esne* respectively. It is generally accepted that the productivity of the suffix *-ing* in this function dwindled in the course of the Viking Age.

Compound patronymics were formed by adding the word *son* (or *daughter*) to the forename of the father. The oldest instance noted by Tengvik is from shortly after the year 600 and there are a few other scattered instances from the eighth and ninth centuries. To these early instances should perhaps be added some contemporary examples of Latin *filius* + father's name. These may be translations of the native compound patronymic with *son*. I shall return to the question of the origin of this Latin construction later.

There is, on the other hand, no reason to assume that the Vikings came upon two other types of patronymic which are common in the medieval period in England, namely the one in which the father's name stands in the nominative case and the other in which the father's name stands in the genitive case, for example *Peter William* and *Peter Williams*. Both types occur frequently in the later English surname system but in my opinion (and that of several older scholars) the first type, *Peter William*, must have been imported from France, and the second type, *Peter Williams*, must be a later medieval phenomenon. There are no certain instances recorded before the Norman Conquest.

It will be remembered that Dr Reaney denied that the English names in *-son* were instances of a type of patronymic that was introduced into England from Scandinavia in the Viking period.

I have already quoted some very early instances of names in *-son* from England. Most of the material cited by Tengvik derives from the tenth and eleventh centuries. It includes about 150 different patronymics in *-sunu*, borne by about 170 individuals. The geographical distribution is uneven but, as noted by Tengvik,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tengvik 1938, p. 147.

this may simply reflect the differing nature of the sources and their varying degree of survival.

Tengvik also gives a survey of the occurrence in the tenth and eleventh centuries of the common Latin patronymic type with *filius*.<sup>1</sup> It would have been useful if Tengvik had also quoted figures for its geographical distribution, since it is likely that in this period it normally represents a translation of the native *son*-patronymic. However Tengvik's figures are to be interpreted, they reveal first that patronymic qualifications with *-sunu* were in use in England before the Viking period and second that in Viking Age England they occur in areas which were subject to little or no Scandinavian influence. Between one-third and one-quarter of the names in *-sunu* recorded in the tenth and eleventh centuries come from Devonshire, for example, while Hampshire and Shropshire are also well represented.

Tengvik draws the only possible conclusion. Patronymic descriptions in *-sunu* were not unknown in England in the ninth century. The type is not an import from Scandinavia. Up to this point Dr Reaney has been proved right. It is, incidentally, of interest that Reaney's opinion had been anticipated by William Camden. In his *Remains concerning Britain* of 1605 Camden writes:<sup>2</sup> 'Neither is it true which some say, *Omnia nomina in son sunt Borealis generis*, whenas it was usual in every part of the Realm.'

We can now turn to the following question: Has the Scandinavian type of patronymic had any influence on the English nomenclature? Was it able to strengthen the position of a native practice in those parts of England which were characterised by Scandinavian influence in the Viking period in the face of types of patronymic imported from the continent in the train of the Conqueror. Did these continental patronymics play a more dominant role in other parts of England than in the Danelaw?

It is first necessary to determine whether the practice of forming patronymics developed differently in the north and east of England and in the south and west.

<sup>1</sup> Tengvik 1938, pp. 166-207.

<sup>2</sup> Camden 1605 (ed. 1870), p. 142.



An answer to the question of geographical variation, however, is attended with several difficulties. The first of these is related to the fact that the nomenclature of the various areas has been studied with varying intensity. Reliable comparative material has only been available to me from three areas exposed in varying degree to Scandinavian influences, the West Riding of Yorkshire, East Anglia and Lancashire, and from a county where Scandinavian influence is negligible, namely Oxfordshire. These four areas have been treated in the volumes of the English Surnames Series, published under the auspices of the Department of English Local History at the University of Leicester. It should be noted, however, that the main aim of this series is the demonstration of the value of surnames in genealogical and social-historical contexts. Their point of departure is to a large degree the modern surnames and the linguistic and philological dimension is only taken into account insofar as it is relevant to this aim. The books have not, therefore, been intended to throw light on all the problems an anthroponymist might wish to study.<sup>1</sup> My comments on the use of patronymics in other parts of the country are based on a patchy and to some degree random collection of material and must only be used with circumspection. It is greatly to be regretted from my point of view that there has as yet been no study of the surnames of Lincolnshire.

In his book Dr Reaney quoted figures for names in *-son* and *filius* around the year 1300 in various parts of England.<sup>2</sup> There are, however, several drawbacks to his treatment, as pointed out for example by McKinley. First, it is only a portion of the relevant names which have been counted. Among the omissions can be mentioned names in *-son* formed on the father's by-name. Second, it is impossible to see what proportion of the total body of surnames the names in *-son* comprise in the individual counties. Dr Reaney's claim that 'Our material lends no support to the theory that surnames in *-son* are chiefly northern . . .'<sup>3</sup> is not based on firm premisses. As noted by McKinley, Reaney's figures—uncertain as they are—show, on the contrary, 'that by

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Redmonds 1976, pp. 75-82.

<sup>2</sup> Reaney 1967, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> Reaney 1967, p. 89.

c. 1130 names in *-son* were more numerous in certain northern counties . . . than in the south and east of England'.<sup>1</sup>

And so they are to this day. In the meantime, of course, names in *-son* have developed into hereditary surnames. G. Redmonds has compiled frequency lists for surnames in 1965 telephone directories for four areas (towns and their surrounding rural areas) in Yorkshire, namely Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield and York, and he has compared these lists with those from Newcastle in the northeast and Bristol in the south. The lists reveal that, whereas almost 17 per cent of the 200 common surnames in the four towns in Yorkshire and 2 per cent of the corresponding number of names in Newcastle names in *-son*, only less than 5 per cent of the 200 most common surnames in Bristol are of this type.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the lists do not reveal what percentage the *-son*-names make up of all surnames. The difference between the northern areas and England is, however, significant. Comparable lists for East Anglia and Lancashire are not presented by McKinley. In East Anglia examples of *-son*-names occur as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries but then they do not reappear until the end of the thirteenth century and even then they are comparatively infrequent until the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> In Lancashire only a few examples have been found from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. From about 1300, however, they occur more frequently in the sources, and by the end of the fourteenth century they have become numerous. Some earlier instances may be hidden under the Latin *filius*-construction but in McKinley's opinion most of them date from after 1300.<sup>4</sup> As already mentioned, more regional surveys are necessary before a clear picture can be gained of the geographical distribution of *-son*-names through the centuries. The continuation of the English Surname Series is therefore to be awaited with impatience.

The second difficulty in connection with the study of the development of the use of patronymics in England is relat-

<sup>1</sup> McKinley 1977, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> Redmonds 1973, pp. 36, 268-9.

<sup>3</sup> McKinley 1975, pp. 129-30.

<sup>4</sup> McKinley 1982, pp. 322-34.

the fact that vernacular forms are extremely rare in the early part of the medieval period, when patronymics normally occur in latinised form with *filius/filia*. It is not always possible to determine what native formation lies behind the Latin construction.

Hugh Smith was well aware of the lacuna in the recorded instances of names in *-son* in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned above, very early instances of the name-type are found in most parts of England, i.e. from the eleventh century or earlier, but then there is a gap until the end of the thirteenth century. Smith explained this gap by referring to the fact that by-names were latinised much more frequently in these early post-Conquest centuries than in later times. According to Smith, many of the *filius*-constructions in the documents must conceal vernacular forms in *-son*. This can often be proved to be the case. In 1316, for example, one and the same man is referred to not only as *Johannes filius Sibbe* but also as *John Sibbeson*, and another as both *Willelmus filius Gotte* and *William Gotson*. Smith considers, therefore, that there was an unbroken continuity in the naming practice of the area he was studying and that for two centuries the *-son*-names were merely concealed under a Latin disguise.

Two main objections have been made to this view. The first is that it is impossible to be sure that the *filius*-construction does actually translate a name in *-son*. It can also represent other forms of patronymic. The second objection is that the vast majority of the forenames compounded with *-son* are not Scandinavian or even English but Norman (according to Reaney) and this is unexpected in a so-called 'Scandinavian name-type'.

The first problem then, is: Can the *filius*-type represent other native patronymics than those in *-son*? The answer can only be that in theory *filius*-names can be translations of all the vernacular forms of patronymic that were current in the area in which the translation took place. There are two ways in which these vernacular forms can be identified. The less profitable one is to attempt to determine the patronymic system that was current in the area before the *filius*-centuries (the twelfth and thirteenth

<sup>1</sup> Smith 1928, pp. 48-9.

centuries). This is unprofitable because the surviving material is sparse and unrepresentative. There is, however, little reason to believe that *filius* can be a translation of the old derivative suffix *-ing*. This was not very productive in the Viking period and probably dropped out of use altogether after the Conquest. In the centuries in question the current patronymics would seem to have been the native formation in *-son* and the imported types: the uninflected patronymic (*William*) and the compound patronymic with prefixed *Fitz-* (*Fitzwilliam*).

A more reliable picture of the basis for the *filius*-translations in an area can be gained from an examination of the patronymics that were current in the area immediately after the *filius*-centuries, that is in the period when the native forms again begin to appear beside the Latin ones and gradually displace them. In general, the native form or forms in question can be assumed to have been the basis for the Latin translations in the preceding centuries.

I shall take my examples from one northern and from one southern area for which material is available in published form.

In the West Riding of Yorkshire the patronymic type in *-son* is by far the commonest one at the time when vernacular forms begin to appear in the material in the fourteenth century. In the Court Rolls of the manor of Wakefield 1307-17, for example, we find 17 instances, and in the decade 1321-31 49 instances in all. In the Yorkshire Fines 1327-47 there are 8 names in *-son*, and in the period 1347-77 a total of 41.<sup>1</sup> Since names in *-son* are also evidenced for this area in the period before 1100, it seems reasonable to assume that the *filius*-type in the intervening period generally represents names in *-son*.

The situation in Oxfordshire is different. From about 1300, when vernacular forms begin to reappear, it is two other types of patronymic that become dominant, the father's name in uninflected form and the father's name in the genitive case. Names in *-son*, on the other hand, are much less common.<sup>2</sup> In this county it must be assumed that *filius* only occasionally translates *-son* and that it is the other two types of patronymic which lie behind most of the *filius*-constructions.

<sup>1</sup> Redmonds 1973, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> McKinley 1977, pp. 211-35.

I would claim, then, that it is possible to gain a reasonable idea of what the *filius*-construction translates by examining the vernacular patronymic type or types current in the area before and after the appearance of the *filius*-type and assessing the frequency of its or their occurrence. And my conclusion is that in a northern area such as Yorkshire the patronymic in *-son* must have been in continuous use from the Viking period and throughout the Middle Ages.

The second objection against the theory of continuity, namely that the personal names in the patronymics tend to be of French origin,<sup>1</sup> is not, in fact, crucial. It would seem that forenames in general tend to be less resistant to foreign influence than by-names. This is connected with the fact that forenames function as proper names independently of their etymological meaning. They do not need to be 'understood' in the normal sense of the word but are merely labels used for distinguishing individuals, i.e. true proper names. There were therefore no barriers of understanding that had to be overcome if an English couple in the medieval period wanted to give their sons Norman forenames such as *William* or *Robert*. It was of no significance to them that *William* was a compound of the words for 'will' and 'helmet' and *Robert* of words meaning 'fame' and 'shining', since the names did not have to be understood in this way in order to function satisfactorily as names.

By-names, on the other hand—and patronymics are by-names—cannot function properly unless they can be understood. They describe or characterise their bearers in one way or another. If a French by-name is to be used according to its proper purpose in England, for example, the word or words it contains must have been borrowed into English, become naturalised in the English language. While *William* and *Robert* could without difficulty be employed in England as fashionable and prestigious loan-names, the children in question could not be referred to as *William Gros* or *Robert Petit*, unless the words *gros* and *petit* had been borrowed into English. Only then would they have the characterising function of the by-name.

The absorption of foreign by-names and by-name systems

<sup>1</sup> Reaney 1967, p. 88.

requires more time and a stronger influence than the absorption of foreign forenames does.

To return to the patronymics: A serviceable illustration of the views I have put forward is offered by the names in *Fitz-: Fitzwilliam, Fitzgilbert*, etc. The first element is, of course, the Anglo-French spelling of Old French *fiz*, French *fil* 'son'. The formation developed in England but in the early period it was restricted to one social class, the aristocracy. The earliest certain instances of the type make their appearance at the end of the twelfth century but *Fitz*-names are never borne by the peasant classes and hardly at all by the middle classes.<sup>1</sup> The word *fil* was only understood by the highest social class. It never entered the English language and hence could not become a common element in the system of patronymics.

There is nothing strange about the fact that French forenames are combined with a native type of patronymic, in spite of what is implied by Reaney.<sup>2</sup> Whereas forenames do not need to be understood, by-names do.

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English has been subjected to foreign influences in the same way as almost all other languages. Such influences may be a result of a conquest by a people speaking a different language who were fortunate enough to be able to form a kind of aristocracy. Their language, in particular its vocabulary, would be in a position to bestow prestige upon those who imitated it and learned it. Another kind of influence is the more peaceful one which results from trade and cultural connections with foreign countries. Such connections, incidentally, sometimes arise as an after-effect of conquest. In every case the native language will be changed, some would perhaps say enriched, by this contact with a foreign influence. The degree of the change can vary greatly

<sup>1</sup> As a surname-type it can be represented in later times in social groups that are descended from the nobility.

<sup>2</sup> In connection with a document from Lincolnshire 1374-5, with 35 instances of the *filius*-type and twice as many of names in *-son*, Reaney 1967, p. 88, says: 'Although that county has been described as the most Scandinavianised county in England, neither here nor in Yorkshire do we find a solitary example of *-son* compounded with an English or Scandinavian name. All are from French personal-names ...'

and is subject to a number of demographic, social and geographical factors which I need not go into here.

As with the language, so with that part of the language that consists of personal names. A native nomenclature and naming system is confronted by names and naming practices which, in the course of time, become absorbed into the language and cease to be looked upon as foreign elements. After this, a new wave of names sweeps in from abroad and is subjected to a similar process of assimilation. At the same time, the native naming system can be developing according to its own internal laws.

And now to sum up: As I see it, the picture presented by the patronymics, the subject of my lecture, is that the patronymic designative system which the Scandinavian settlers found on their arrival in England was an old Germanic system. The most important type, that in which *son* was added to the father's forename, was familiar to the Scandinavians from their homelands and they continued to make use of it whenever an opportunity arose for boasting of their family connections. One might hazard a guess that the conquering and colonising Scandinavians had more reason to form patronymics than had the native population, precisely because the incomers needed to demonstrate their position as the new élite, proud of their family connections and powerful. This can only be guesswork, however, but at the very least the position of the native *-son*-type of patronymic must have been consolidated by the fact that the newcomers also made use of it and let it be understood that it was a creditable addition to one's forename.

The Norman Conquest in 1066 brought new settlers and new linguistic influences to the British Isles and these were to be of great significance for English society and the English language. It also, of course, brought in its train new personal names and new systems of naming, including a few types of patronymic that had not been known before in England. The most important of these, consisting of the father's name in the nominative case, must have been comparatively easy to assimilate and it was in fact adopted by the English. What is significant, however, is that it was particularly in the areas outside the Danelaw, areas where the native type in *-son* had not received the support that

the Scandinavians had been able to offer with their corresponding *-son*-names, that the new types became popular. While thus agreeing with Dr Reaney that the English names in *-son* are not an import from Scandinavia, I do not consider that he was right to refuse to acknowledge that the Scandinavians did exert an influence on the English *-son*-name system.

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